

# London must double gipsy sites in next decade, says Boris

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City Hall Reporter

BORIS JOHNSON is planning to double the number of sites for travellers and gypsies across London, the Standard has learned.

Nearly 800 caravan pitches will be created in the next eight years, taking the number of permanent pitches to almost 1,500.

Councils will have to decide whether to expand sites or build encampments, but a report commissioned by the Mayor said it was likely that between 37 and 55 sites would be created.

The plan, part of the Mayor's draft housing strategy, is likely to provoke furious reactions. The Mayor has consulted the boroughs, gypsies and travellers and the scheme will become part of the London Plan, which will be published later this year.

Mr Johnson argues that he has been forced to improve traveller accommodation by central Government.

Most of the accommodation is to be in Bromley, Ealing, Bexley, Hillingdon and Haringey, with only the City and Westminster avoiding having any extra pitches.

An investigation into traveller accommodation by London Councils, which represents the borough authorities, found 15 per cent of caravans were on unauthorised land and facilities were inadequate. Mr Johnson's draft housing



**Expanding:** there will be double the sites like this one in Keston, Kent

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strategy states: "The 2008 London gypsy and traveller accommodation needs assessment, produced by the London boroughs with the co-operation of the GLA, demonstrates the need for 768 residential pitches over the next ten years, more than doubling the number of pitches. Much of this need arises from gypsies and travellers currently housed in unsuitable or poor quality accommodation."

The last site was built in 1996 while council-owned facilities have closed. There are an estimated 13,500 gipsy

and traveller families in London, with 84 per cent living in purpose-built homes on the sites.

The shortage of caravan pitches was discovered by council officials carrying out a survey of accommodation required by Whitehall. Their finding forces all London local authorities to increase provision, as they are legally obliged to provide adequate sites.

Senior sources at City Hall said the need to dramatically expand sites was a "political hand grenade". It would be especially damaging for a Conservative Mayor to order more sites in suburban Tory constituencies.

A source close to the Mayor said: "There's a distinct feeling we have been painted into a corner here. No one wants to be seen to be forcing boroughs to suddenly have to have lots more travellers and people were getting rather worked up about it. But it has to be in the London Plan as ordered by the Government."

Travellers groups said the pitches were badly needed. Freda Schicker, director of the London Gipsy Traveller unit, said: "We have people who have been waiting lists for years and years and can only get rented housing."

"We would prefer to see smaller new sites as they tend to raise the least objection, preferably near services and shops and on quiet roads."

If a borough refuses to comply the Government could take it to court.

## PLANNED NEW SITES

| Council              | Now | Rise by 2017 |
|----------------------|-----|--------------|
| Barking & Dagenham   | 11  | 12           |
| Barnet               | 0   | 15           |
| Brent                | 45  | 21           |
| Bexley               | 32  | 57           |
| Bromley              | 66  | 119          |
| Camden               | 5   | 5            |
| City of London       | 0   | 0            |
| Croydon              | 2   | 19           |
| Ealing               | 36  | 64           |
| Enfield              | 0   | 2            |
| Greenwich            | 46  | 45           |
| Hackney              | 26  | 34           |
| H'smith & Fulham     | 0   | 6            |
| Haringey             | 10  | 58           |
| Harrow               | 3   | 16           |
| Havering             | 32  | 23           |
| Hillingdon           | 20  | 43           |
| Hounslow             | 20  | 15           |
| Islington            | 0   | 3            |
| Kensington & Chelsea | 20  | 12           |
| Kingslon             | 23  | 16           |
| Lambeth              | 15  | 10           |
| Lewisham             | 5   | 19           |
| Merton               | 15  | 16           |
| Newham               | 19  | 19           |
| Redbridge            | 16  | 17           |
| Richmond             | 13  | 14           |
| Southwark            | 38  | 17           |
| Sutton               | 26  | 13           |
| Tower Hamlets        | 36  | 40           |
| Waltham Forest       | 20  | 8            |
| Wandsworth           | 10  | 10           |
| Westminster          | 0   | 0            |
| London total         | 649 | 768          |